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ABSTRACT

Presented is an overview of a 1975 New Orleans conference on educating severely and profoundly retarded children. Brief summaries of remarks by teachers, program administrators, state education agency personnel and others are provided on such topics as the application of behavior modification principles, recent legislation, parental involvement, financial considerations in implementing legislation, environmental factors, curriculum, and teacher education. (CL)

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educating the twenty-four hour retarded child

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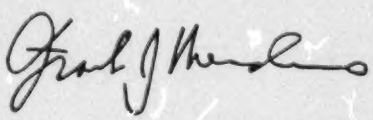
Foreword

Severely and profoundly mentally retarded children — how can we help them develop to their full potentials as human beings? What methods work most effectively in teaching these students new skills? How can we best serve them in public schools? These are some of the questions participants brought to the national conference, "Educating the 24-Hour Retarded Child," on March 31 through April 2, 1975, in the colorful city of New Orleans. The conference was conducted by the National Association for Retarded Citizens through a grant from the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped. Guest speakers were invited whose expertise ranged from developing and monitoring educational services to personnel training in special education.

This report offers a brief overview of what happened in New Orleans in early 1975. Its purpose is to offer a reflection of the conference itself — to summarize the needs as we saw them and to point toward possible answers to those needs. And answers are in sight — not easy or quick answers — but answers gained through working together toward the goal of assuring quality public school services for all severely and profoundly retarded persons.

We wish to thank all of those individuals who participated in this dynamic conference and hope that they will share their new knowledge with others concerned with the welfare of severely handicapped students.



Frank J. Menolascino, M.D.
President, NARC
1976

Recent court decisions and legislative actions have overturned our school systems' long-standing privilege of denying public education to severely handicapped children. While this must certainly be viewed as a significant victory in the fight for the rights of the individual, the "zero-reject" movement has undeniably subjected the educational community to the brunt of new parental, legal and legislative pressures. Educational administrators and professionals are increasingly faced with new, and often unanticipated issues affecting the education of severely or profoundly retarded students within the public school system. In many instances, both educators and parents alike have been unprepared to cope with this sudden shift in responsibility.

The National Association for Retarded Citizens, the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped and many other interested organizations and individuals share this concern, and seek answers to the problem of fulfilling the public school educational needs of severely and profoundly retarded students. In the spring of 1975, over 700 persons from 46 states gathered in New Orleans, Louisiana. Participants of the conference, entitled "Educating the 24-Hour Retarded Child," included state education agency personnel, program administrators, teachers, teacher trainers, university students, and many others. Some came to share their experience regarding current educational programs for severely handicapped persons. Others sought knowledge which might help them meet the challenge of this new concept. Some participants questioned the feasibility of public education for the markedly retarded student — and wanted answers. All felt that changes must be made on the part of educational service agencies in order to meet their new responsibilities of educating *all* children.

This conference brought together for the first time those persons responsible for monitoring and delivering services to severely and profoundly mentally retarded individuals. NARC believes that the success of the gathering was a meaningful step in assuring appropriate public school educational services for severely and profoundly retarded children.

"We are dealing with the most severely handicapped members of the human race — individuals whose nervous systems have been seriously damaged, or never developed properly. The severely and profoundly retarded include approximately the lowest 5% of the retarded population. More than 99% of *all* persons learn more easily than they do. Many have IQs that may be termed 'unmeasurable.'

"When these children enter school they may exhibit a wide variety of social and developmental handicaps. Still, *all* of these children are human beings — all have a right to learn, to develop and to be treated as individuals."

Dr. Philip Roos
Executive Director
National Association for
Retarded Citizens

The conference opened on the evening of March 31 to a standing-room-only crowd in the International Ballroom of the Fairmont Hotel. Opening remarks were given by Dr. Walter J. Cegelka, Chairman of the NARC Education Subcommittee. Dr. Philip Roos, Executive Director of the Association, then challenged conference participants to meet the needs of the future, and pointed out that in a land where human rights are held in high esteem, our actions have not always kept pace with our ideals.

Dr. Roos noted that while social justice has taken giant strides within this century, the basic human and legal rights of countless thousands of our citizens have been violated. They have been denied access to desperately needed resources, and subjected to dehumanizing practices — practices sanctioned on the assumption that there are degrees of humanness, and that only the "fully human" are entitled to participate in society — that deviations from cultural norms are valid grounds for rejection and isolation.

Dr. Roos noted that although recent legislation, federal regulations and court decisions have reaffirmed the basic premise of our national philosophy, we should not delude ourselves into the belief that new laws will work magic — that severely and profoundly retarded persons' biological limitations are inconsequential. We cannot assume that all people can develop into so-called "normal" human beings if only presented with the proper environment. Yet, much *can* be done to help these severely handicapped individuals. Impressive programs are now underway. Research has documented the value of new procedures. Techniques are now available which have demonstrated effectiveness. But we are still in the dark ages when it comes to understanding the human mind. We have, however, taken the first few steps in what promises to be a long and rewarding journey.

"The application of behavior principles to the teaching of retarded children is not another educational fad, and those who might stand around patiently waiting for it to pass will be disappointed. Since it is the end product of 50 years of experimental research and theory construction, it is likely that with continued support of basic and applied research, it will become even more effective."

Dr. Sidney W. Bijou
Member, NARC Research Committee
Professor of Psychology
University of Illinois, Champaign

What *can* be done to help severely and profoundly retarded individuals? Despite the serious nature of these students' handicaps, Dr. Sidney Bijou of the University of Illinois gave conference participants cause for optimism in his discussion of the behavioral approach and its applications to the educational problems of mentally retarded students. Behavioral techniques, based on operant conditioning, have been applied to the teaching of retarded persons at all levels for just over 15 years, and at present are considered by many ranking educators to be the approach with the greatest potential.

Many problems have resulted from misunderstandings about the nature of this approach. Operant conditioning is the strengthening of "purposive" behavior, and is vastly different from the conditioning methods which shocked the public in *Brave New World*, *1984*, *The Manchurian Candidate*, and *Clockwork Orange*. Basically, behavioral analysis consists of determining specifically what skill we want a child to learn, dividing that skill into its components and systematically reinforcing the desired behavior.

The applied behavioral analysis format for teaching the severely and profoundly retarded child can be implemented in both the classroom and home setting. In either case, success depends largely upon teacher training, commitment and administrative support. Teachers must abandon their traditional concepts of curriculum if they are to be successful with severely and profoundly retarded students. They must be trained to deal with a whole range of behaviors that have rarely been the concern of the public schools. The traditional three R's are simply not enough here. Teachers must be prepared to help their students learn to survive in the world from the moment they wake up in the morning until they go to bed at night.

Active parent participation is more than an ingredient in this approach — it is a *must*. Without it, there is little hope that behaviors acquired in the classroom will be maintained.

"As a part of our nation's growing concern for the handicapped, we have seen the Congress enact legislation increasingly based on a commitment to children. We have also seen the Judicial Branch representing the rights of handicapped children in a more vigorous way. This concern has not been limited, of course, to federal government bodies. There has been a tremendous amount of interest — perhaps more than in any other area — expressed by the states themselves."

Dr. Edwin W. Martin
Deputy Commissioner of Education
Bureau of Education for the Handicapped
U.S. Office of Education

Certainly, providing proper educational services for all retarded children is one of the most vital issues in the field of mental retardation. At the 1975 New Orleans Conference, Dr. Edwin W. Martin, Acting Deputy Director of Education, Bureau of Education for the Handicapped, pointed out that we are witnessing a growing sense of national commitment in this area. This commitment is reflected in part by the emphasis Commissioner Bell has placed on programs for all handicapped persons and in part by the Bureau's high priority on funding for severely handicapped students.

Dr. Martin emphasized the Bureau's role in the implementation of a new provision of the Education of the Handicapped Act which requires the states to make a commitment to educating the more severely handicapped children. He noted that Congress has charged BEH with the responsibility of distributing funds with the priority upon unserved children.

The Bureau of Education for the Handicapped is perhaps one of the strongest forces behind the implementation of legislation and the provision of programs beneficial to severely and profoundly retarded children. This agency has established as a broad goal the provision of equal educational opportunities for all handicapped children. With respect to severely handicapped individuals, the Bureau's aim is to enable this group to become as independent as possible, thereby reducing their requirements for institutional care and providing opportunity for self-development.

Establishing such services is a big job. Mr. Ed Wilson, a Program Specialist with the Bureau, reminded conference participants that an estimated one million severely handicapped children are now totally excluded from the educational system, while at least another 300,000 are not receiving adequate services. There are a number of reasons why: a lack of experienced personnel . . . a general void of appropriate curricula and training programs . . . a scarcity of specialized materials and equipment, and a general lack of concern, in many quarters, for the needs of such persons.

"If we are truly to achieve our goals in this field, we must dedicate ourselves to some basic — but vital — operating premises. We must promote community understanding of the fact that severely and profoundly handicaped children *can*, and should be served in the public school sector; that they *can* be integrated into many regular school activities; and that they are capable of learning beyond our current expectations. We must understand that parental participation is essential to expanding successful intervention strategies for severely handicapped children."

Dr. Edward Sontag, Chief
Cognitive and Affective Branch
Division of Personnel Preparation
Bureau of Education for the Handicapped
U.S. Office of Education

It is clear that institutions of higher education must drastically redefine their roles if they intend to provide quality personnel for instructing handicapped children. The Bureau's Dr. Edward Sontag noted that it is no longer enough for universities to serve as predominantly "preservice delivery systems." Equal emphasis must be placed upon inservice, staff development, and preservice training. Universities must also accept the responsibility for retraining those professionals already in their employ.

It is a rare school system that provides comprehensive programs for severely retarded, severely emotionally disturbed, and multiply handicapped students. While severely handicapped students, as a general group, present no more administrative problems than any other students, they do bring to bear problems that are more pervasive, intense — and more expensive to solve. Most school systems now have little experience in matters such as needed medical services, transportation, affiliations with non-school agencies, etc.

There are a number of areas of concern in the educational field in regard to severely retarded people. Basic to the needs of this population is the provision of continuous educational opportunities. Every effort must be made to provide developmental intervention services for severely handicapped individuals of all ages.

Much can be done within the public school system to assure that severely retarded students receive the educational opportunities they deserve. Essential, however, to the students' successful participation in any such program is parental involvement throughout the educative process. Frances Bicknell of the Wisconsin Association for Retarded Citizens reminded conference participants that parents of retarded children have a proud record of accomplishment in this area. They have helped administer day care and educational centers for their children who were excluded from public schools, and have participated in every activity from janitorial duties to the drafting of successful legislation. Now, however, parental roles are changing, and the emphasis should be on cooperative efforts with educators in assuring adequate educational services.

Dr. Luke S. Watson, President of Behavior Modification Technology, Inc., pointed out that parents can be invaluable allies in the educative process, and noted that there is impressive evidence that programs employing parents as behavior modification technicians have the potential to provide an economical, effective alternative to existing clinical intervention techniques.

Inherent in the provision of adequate opportunities for severely and profoundly retarded persons are services and needs directly related to the actual educational process. The expense of such programs is a problem that must be faced—and solved—by the public in general, and the school systems concerned, in particular. Dr. Jean McGrew of the Madison, Wisconsin Public Schools, addressed these problems at the New Orleans meeting, stressing that while legislatures have mandated that school systems provide adequate programs for

all severely and profoundly handicapped students, they have mandated responsibility without providing for the actual financial support itself. Most school districts, then, must reallocate finances that are already stretched to the limit to provide such programs. McGrew reminded participants that while conferences such as the New Orleans meeting provide good opportunities for special education professionals to share mutual concerns, it is imperative that dialogue be established with persons who have administrative control over the selection of programs for funding. He stressed the importance of establishing close cooperation with those in the position of making decisions within the public schools, including especially school board members.

Another important consideration in the educative process is the environment of the retarded student. George Gray of the New York Department of Mental Hygiene noted that many educational facilities exhibit restrictive environments for handicapped children, and pointed out that these children should, ideally, be placed where they can obtain the best education, at the least distance from mainstream society. Society should be aware of the condition, problems and potentials of such children — and this awareness is not enhanced by hiding them from public view.

Progress is evident in the area of environmental concern for the severely and profoundly retarded. The mutual use of space shared by special education and regular instruction has influenced the origin of a new type of school specially designed to integrate handicapped and non-handicapped students. Open school and environmental play complexes are providing rich, new worlds of stimulation and opportunity to support the efforts of those responsible for teaching the severely retarded student.

"We believe that the utilization of data on child development is the most practical basis for arriving at uniform guidelines for teaching the typical infant and child. Through developmental pinpoints, we can establish a child's exact place in the sequence of skills development, and provide programming interventions that *match* the child's instructional needs."

Dr. Norris G. Haring, Director
Child Development and Mental
Retardation Center
Experimental Education Unit
University of Washington, Seattle

Concern for a proper teaching curriculum for severely handicapped students has prompted a number of efforts to develop sound, workable guidelines. Dr. Norris Haring of the University of Washington noted the importance of coordinating these efforts and evolving a developmental curriculum with a valid theoretical rationale and a common content base throughout the many levels of development. Such a curriculum could remain in a state of continuous development for some time, allowing for periodic modification or refinement based on the performance records of a number of handicapped children.

As Haring pointed out, time must not be consumed teaching responses, skills and facts that are not essential to increasing the independence of the severely handicapped child. This concern was reiterated by Dr. Lou Brown of the University of Wisconsin, who noted that it is vital that public schools prepare severely handicapped students to function as independently as possible socially, vocationally and personally in the least restricting post-school environment. He further stated that preparing students to function in large residential institutions, or for fostering or maintaining the development of environments that unduly shelter or restrict the individual cannot be justified.

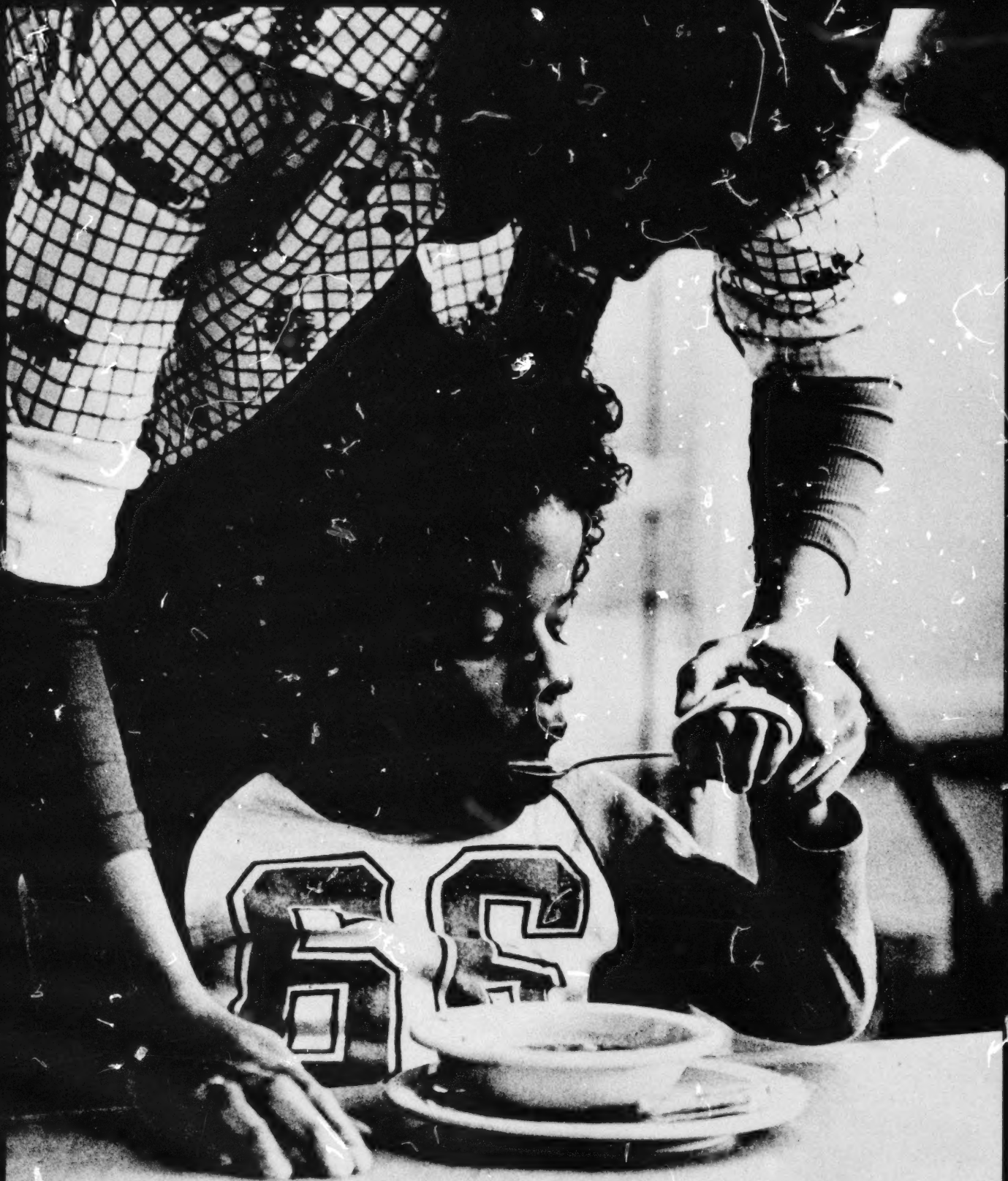
Because of limited educational opportunities in the past, and the almost inevitable placement of severely and profoundly retarded citizens in large institutions, it might once have been acceptable to teach this population to "walk in line," or "make pot holders," with little concern for *why* such skills were taught. Now, though, severely handicapped students will be

enrolled in public school programs for as long as twenty-one years. Longitudinal public education, coupled with the goals of the deinstitutionalization and child advocacy movements, compel us to *justify* the teaching of any specific skill.

Indeed, increased understanding of the components of sound public school educational services was one of the goals of the "Educating the 24-Hour Retarded Child" Conference. Hopefully, through the collective efforts of many persons from diverse orientations and backgrounds, comprehensive, longitudinal and quality educational services *can* be generated, and substantial developmental changes will result in both the functioning levels and ultimate lifestyles of those citizens who—for the moment, at least—are referred to as severely handicapped.

Dr. Cecil Colwell of the Northwest Louisiana State School pointed out the need for changing our way of thinking about teaching the retarded individual, noting that we have, for some years, actively pursued a self-contradictory course in dealing with mentally retarded persons. Through words and deeds, we have said that the profoundly retarded *cannot* be trained. At the same time, we have instructed our attendants in residential institutions to vigorously carry out training in environments so sterile that we knew little progress would be made.

Recently, however, we have begun to re-examine our concepts and have found we have more resources than we thought we did. Through the use of techniques based on the stimuli-response-reinforcement model, many programs have developed which have demonstrated success in educating the severely and profoundly retarded person to act and behave in a more normal fashion.



Establishing educational programs for the severely and profoundly retarded in public schools is, of course, only one aspect of the problem. Dr. Charles Galloway of the Eastern Nebraska Community Office of Retardation, informed conference participants of some of the problems of providing educational services in non-public school settings. While such services are, necessarily, critical to meeting the current needs of these students, we should remember that the very existence of education in non-public settings represents a community-wide compromise when these programs parallel public services available to most children or adults in the community. Agencies now providing such services should consider their purposes carefully, and examine the degree to which they might be supporting an exclusionary and isolationist community policy toward a segment of the population.

While conference participants were vitally aware of the need for proper educational programming for the severely and profoundly retarded student, they were also cognizant of the many problems inherent in turning "good intentions" into practical, working programs. One of the most vital ingredients to a successful program is a vast reservoir of properly trained teachers. Unfortunately, we are critically short of such talent. Now that we have established new legislation to assure the rights of severely and profoundly handicapped individuals, we must turn those rights into active, worthwhile programs. Can we do it? Will the net effect of our efforts be to transport more children faster to participate in ineffective instruction? We may be able to create instant authority for our actions through court or legislative mandates, but we cannot create instant teachers or programs to carry out that authority. We can't assume that needs will be fulfilled simply because there is social agreement that such needs exist.

"The rapid expansion of special education programs during the past ten years is a poor predictor of the future in terms of adding additional training programs today. It is difficult to establish new courses, let alone new programs. The changing climate in higher education has come at a time when departments of special education are experiencing large-scale demands for personnel — and finite funds."

Dr. Edward L. Meyen, Chairman
Department of Special Education
University of Kansas, Lawrence

Dr. Edward L. Meyen of the University of Kansas pointed out that we have more colleges and universities *preparing* to train personnel to teach the severely and profoundly handicapped than we have currently established programs.

We must not repeat our history of twenty years ago, when it seemed quite proper for every teachers college in the country to train special class teachers for the mildly mentally retarded student.

What, then, is the answer? The typical special education faculty is not oriented toward the training strategies necessary to prepare teaching personnel for the severely and profoundly retarded. University funding for such activities is difficult to come by. Most of our present programs are supported through federal funding. Without that funding, any program continuation becomes speculative at best.

Possible answers to these problems are on the horizon. One potential solution is a network of regional training centers to provide for area recruitment and better utilization of available resources.

Additionally, while there are virtually no certification programs for teachers of the severely and profoundly retarded, there *are* highly competent non-credentialed teachers who *have* had extensive and successful experience in private non-profit agency classes and other non-public school facilities. Dr. James Tawney of the University of Kentucky touched upon this subject at the conference, and urged development of a performance-based certification program which would enable these teachers to continue working with children — a standard that would also enable the exclusion of inept teachers from the classroom. Certification, he noted, should be based on proof of positive change in child performance. It stands to reason that a competency

based model may well be more appropriate for training teachers of severely and profoundly handicapped pupils than for any other target population of learners.

What skills does a teacher need to teach the severely and profoundly retarded individual — and what are the most effective methods of utilizing these skills? Dr. Lou Brown pointed out that one of the more crucial differences between teaching normal or mildly handicapped students and severely retarded students is the degree of precision required when *presenting* instructional content.

The skills required and fostered by a task analysis orientation seem ideally suited for teachers in this field. Through this discipline, such initially nebulous objectives as teaching a value, an appreciation, an attitude, a skill, a concept, an understanding, a subtlety or a feeling *can* be accomplished with severely handicapped students. Realistic objectives are established, and instruction is tailored to individual functioning levels — greatly facilitating the development of more effective and efficient classroom programming.

Dr. Alice Hayden of the University of Washington noted that teachers must learn how to make accurate assessments of child performance based on systematic observation. They have an excellent vantage point for watching a child over an extended period of time, in a natural setting. By learning to alert themselves to those handicapping conditions that develop slowly and cumulatively, they can take steps to remediate them early — and can also adjust curriculum needs accordingly.

As Dr. Frances Connor of Columbia University stated in New Orleans, severely and multiply handicapped children are individuals. Therefore, teachers of these students must develop the knowledge and skill to enable them to know how their pupils function at different stages of development, how they learn best, how their environment can be modified to promote learning, and how to evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching process.

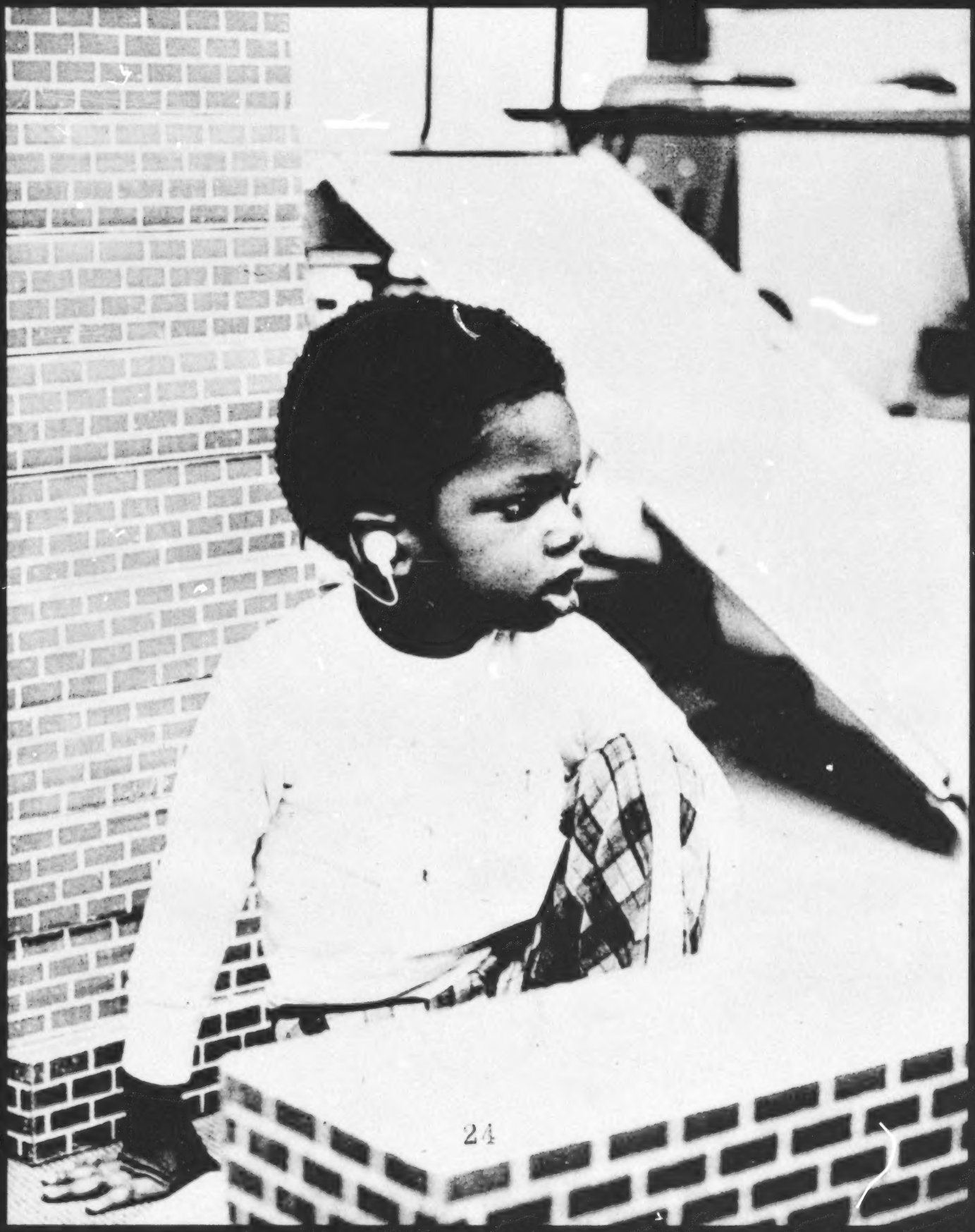
"We encourage freedom and individuality, while we weed out those who appear to be dangerous and maladaptive — and pray that serious blunders have not been perpetrated in the name of society. Children must always exemplify humanity's universal and continuing enthusiasm for a better future. If we fail with children, we fail with everything."

Dr. Burton Blatt, Director
Divison of Special Education
and Rehabilitation
Syracuse University
Syracuse, New York

Dr. Burton Blatt summed up the feelings of conference participants when he noted that each human being has unduplicatable value. That value is not bound to his educability, but to his intrinsic and inalienable right to be respected — because he *is* a human being. We do not always recognize, or acknowledge that right. During a person's life he struggles to realize his gifts, while society seeks to trap him, tame him and standardize him to fit society's picture of itself. Sometimes, though, for better or for worse, we come across people who will *not* be molded. They cause us problems, yet they are our major investment in the future. And it has always been society's dilemma to decide who should be molded and controlled, and who should be free as the wind.

Dr. Blatt further pointed out that one irony of our culture is that we revere life but disdain freedom. In our zeal to protect the weak, the aged and the handicapped, we segregate, stigmatize and make pariahs out of whole legions of people. We build institutions to incarcerate the blind and the retarded. And when these "different" people are out of sight and out of mind, we not only shut the door against their chance to "see" and understand us, we preclude any possibility that *we* will ever see and understand them.

The concept that all people are entitled to freedom under a just law has bloodied the soil of many nations. Sometimes the concept falters — sometimes it takes a step forward. But the idea of freedom, individuality, human values and human resources continues to intrude upon the public consciousness, crying for legitimacy and support. Hopefully, those people who gathered in New Orleans in the spring of 1975 will play an important part in upholding and forwarding at least one aspect of that idea.



In Retrospect . . .

- Public school curricula must be designed to accommodate the special learning needs of severely and profoundly retarded students.
- Public school services should be viewed as only one component in an overall community effort to provide appropriate life-long services for severely and profoundly handicapped individuals.
- Efforts to establish programs which provide parents with the necessary skills and knowledge to become effectively involved in educational programming should be promoted.
- Educational services for severely handicapped children should be located so as to provide appropriate education in the least restrictive environment possible.
- Universities should place as much importance on inservice training and staff development as they presently do on preservice teacher education.
- Certification programs should be performance-based to ensure that only the most competent teachers are allowed to work with those students who need the most help.
- Educational funds should be redistributed in school programs so that severely handicapped students may receive the quality educational services to which they are entitled.
- National commitment should continue to be directed toward providing proper educational services to all handicapped students.

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23

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